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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Guatemalan Congressional and Municipal
Elections on 3 December 1961

1. Offices to be filled: Half the membership of the 66-member unicameral congress for four-year terms. Also, mayors and councilmen in 296 municipalities.

2. Background: President Miguel Ydigoras was elected to a six-year term in early 1958 after six months of political turmoil in the wake of the assassination of President Castillo Armas. Ydigoras has generally respected democratic forms, despite almost constant plotting against him. Although a strong personal leader and a skillful political manipulator, he has had to devote a disproportionate amount of his time and energy merely to staying in power. His accomplishments both of a material nature and in advancing the political maturity of the people have been meager. The two previous congresses with which he has had to deal have repeatedly frustrated him by refusing or delaying legislation which he has requested. The next congress, composed half of the newly elected deputies, will serve during the last two years of his term. If the 1963 presidential elections, like those of 1958, result in the absence of an absolute majority for any candidate, congress will be constitutionally charged with choosing the next president from the leading contenders.

3. Parties participating:

a. National Democratic Reconciliation party
(Redencion): The personal political vehicle of

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President Ydigoras, Redencion benefits from government support. Its members reflect the middle-of-the-road and strongly anti-Communist orientation of the President.

b. Democratic Union party (PUD): Led by defectors from Ydigoras' Redencion party, the PUD is nevertheless generally pro-government.

c. National Democratic Movement (MDN): The pro-government and strongly anti-Communist remnant of the political machine of the late President Castillo Armas. MDN leader Cruz Salazar, now a cabinet officer, was defeated by Ydigoras in the 1958 election and retains his presidential ambitions.

d. National Liberation Movement (MLN): A rightist opposition party composed of elements who broke with the MDN when the latter aligned itself with Ydigoras. Its members have engaged in sporadic revolutionary plotting and acts of terrorism against the government.

e. Guatemalan Christian Democratic party (DCG): A church-supported party containing moderate leftists as well as rightists. The DCG generally opposes the government.

f. Revolutionary party (PR): An opposition party of moderate leftist and anti-Communist orientation, the PR has considerable popular support but in recent months has suffered from internal factionalism. Until recent defections, it was probably the strongest single party in Guatemala.

g. Authentic Democratic party (PAD): The personal political vehicle of rightist Col. Roberto Barrios Pena, who recently broke with the President.

h. Revolutionary Unity party (PUR): A Communist front, the PUR has been denied the legal registration that would permit it to take part in the election, but it is likely to engage in agitation.

4. Present party strengths: Redencion has the important advantage of government support and the most effective machinery for getting out the vote. Together

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with the PUD and the MDN, it can probably count on a majority of the votes. The three leading opposition parties, the PR, the DCG, and the MLN, have periodically discussed a temporary electoral alliance under which they would apportion congressional candidacies among them. Such an alliance, still not formalized a month before the election, would present the pro-government parties with a more effective challenge, but it also would probably lead to further factionalization in and defections from the largest opposition group, the PR.

5. Principal issues: Partisanship will be based more on personalities and political maneuvering than on basic issues. Jockeying in anticipation of the presidential elections two years from now is an unstated but important element in these elections. All parties participating are anti-Castro and anti-Communist. In the past, Ydigoras has frequently exploited the issues of Castroism and Guatemalan claims to British Honduras for political purposes.

6. Significance for the US: The conviction that the US was responsible for the anti-Communist Guatemalan revolution of 1954 is widespread in Latin America and elsewhere in the world. The US is thus committed in many eyes to a continuing responsibility for the development in Guatemala of democratic and stable government free of Communist influence.

Much of Ydigoras' still pending legislative program, such as the proposed personal income tax bill, is geared to fulfillment of the "self-help" features of the Alliance for Progress. The outgoing congress has failed to comply with Ydigoras' request for speedy passage of these measures. Prompt action by the new congress would be a boost to the President's prestige and would permit the planning of a long-term program of social and economic development, the key to US aid policies in Latin America.

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Acting Assistant Director
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